



Applying Fire to the Forest: Prescribed (RX) fire is a useful tool for managing national forest lands. Approximately 20,000 acres are burned annually throughout the 650,000 acre Cherokee National Forest. Spring is the time of year when a significant portion of the prescribed burning is conducted.

To many people the word fire creates visions of great devastation and waste. While this concept can be true of wildfires, it is the opposite with prescribed fires. The term prescribed fire means exactly what it implies. It is a recommended treatment for a specific area.

Wildfires usually burn with great intensity and cause damage to the forest environment and can be a threat to life and property.



Low intensity RX fire

On the other hand, low intensity prescribed fires are beneficial and very important to the management of national forest land.

Why Use Fire? RX fire is used on national forest land for several reasons including:

- 1) *Fuel (vegetation) Reduction* - RX fire reduces rapid buildup of combustible fuels that can feed high intensity wildfires that can be a threat to communities and seriously damage natural resources;
- 2) *Wildlife Habitat* - RX fire promotes new sprout and herbaceous growth that serve as cover and food for a variety of wildlife including songbirds, bears, pollinators, deer and turkeys.
- 3) *Site Preparation* - RX fire is useful for clearing and preparing the soil for seeding and planting trees; and
- 4) *Managing Competing Vegetation* - RX fire helps eliminate unwanted species that crowd and compete with desirable species.



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When to Use Fire: Before prescribed burns are conducted on national forest land, a well thought out and documented "prescription" is written by Forest Service fire and resource specialists. A prescription identifies objectives of the proposed burn, examines possible environmental impacts, addresses smoke dispersal, describes how and when the burn will be conducted and under what weather conditions.



How is it Done? Once an area has been recommended for treatment with fire and the prescription has been approved, the task of preparing the area for burning begins.

Control lines are established and the resources needed for each burn are identified. Crews and equipment are assigned as needed to each burn. Every precaution is taken to ensure a safe operation is carried out.



Burns are ignited by hand or with helicopters that drop small ping-pong ball like spheres that slowly ignite after they hit the ground.



At any point during a prescribed burn a decision can be made to stop burning if conditions are not right. Prescribed burns are conducted when conditions will minimize the amount of smoke produced and its effect on people.

Safety is top priority of every prescribed burn. Before any burn starts, managers consider the safety of people, property and the natural resources.

Reducing heavy vegetation (fuel) build up with prescribed fire helps protect communities from the threat of wildfire. Removing certain vegetation helps deprive a wildfire of fuel.



Although other methods of treatment have been used, none have been found that can produce the same benefits as prescribed fire for the same cost. Other methods may cost many times as much and have less benefit to forest ecosystems.

